

Coping as a Travelling Concept in Conflict Research

Key note at the Annual Conference IRC «Religious Conflicts and Coping Strategies»

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1. Travel Bug

Searching useful tools for interdisciplinary research

Human history is packed with conflicts involving religion. And so are the news today. Many conflicts, present and past, are perceived and conceptualized as religious. However, opinions on the role of religion in conflicts are divided. Some consider religion to be a primary cause of conflict. Others suppose that religions are basically peaceful and are only instrumentalised in conflicts for political or social reasons. The clash of these opposing views has the potential to complicate conflicts involving religion – but also to stimulate crucial interdisciplinary research.

It is important to understand when and where exactly religious factors become relevant in specific conflicts. And it is equally important to know under which political, historical and social conditions religion fuels or pacifies a conflict situation. This was the starting point of our enterprise “Interfaculty Research Cooperation: Religious Conflicts and Coping Strategies”. We have now opened a broad and intensive interdisciplinary discourse on the question: What role do the varied dimensions of religion play in different conflicts, past and present, and how are they related to successful or failed coping strategies adopted in different conflicts?

The term "coping" came up rather accidentally in one of our first conversations about the topic of religious conflicts. If I remember correctly, it was my colleague Isabelle Noth, Professor of Religious Psychology, who first used it. In fact, the term “coping” has been coined in individual psychology. Now, it has embarked on a journey into other disciplines within the IRC. And it is our aim to apply it – in the sense of a travelling concept – to social conflicts involving religion. We believe that the concept of “coping” has the potential to overcome false alternatives in conflict research as well as limitations of conflict management and politics. The term has already been recognized as an innovative concept and may even become a trailblazing concept in conflict research. One of the main goals of our IRC in general and of our annual conference more specifically is precisely to critically examine how far this concept has travelled and if it is still on the right track.

Those of you who attended the IRC's kick-off workshop last year may remember that we had a virtual plane take off for a flight over the Alps with the famous Bernese singer-songwriter Mani Matter. If I talk about “coping as a travelling concept in conflict research” today, this metaphor of "travelling" is not simply intended to make an academic lecture a little more entertaining, but it is intended to serve interdisciplinary cooperation.

The song "Alpeflug" by Mani Matter is about a plane crashing because due to the engine noise the passengers fail to communicate to each other the fact that the fuel has run out. We are very grateful to keep the plane of our IRC going thanks to the continuing generous supply of financial fuel from the University of Bern. In order to be able to discover as much as possible on our adventurous travels we must seize this wonderful opportunity, focus our efforts and aim for higher peaks and even more secluded valleys. One very specific tool to assist all members of the IRC in our joint endeavour is the scientific questionnaire. This questionnaire is completed annually by all projects and evaluated for the inductive building of an analytical model for conflicts with religious dimensions and coping strategies. Some of the answers to the first two questionnaires provide the material for my remarks today.

2. Preparation

Potentials and Risks of Travelling Concepts

The IRC combines academic disciplines from five faculties. Each of the 12 individual projects is led by at least two project leaders representing different academic disciplines. We call this "grassroot interdisciplinarity". The idea behind this kind of interdisciplinarity is that different insights, approaches and methods can be exchanged in a much more efficient and productive way at this basic level to the benefit of all. Still, the IRC as a whole is faced with some of the challenges typical for interdisciplinary collaborative research projects: Shared questions, topics and approaches have to be found that enable a discussion across disciplinary boundaries and guarantee the notorious "added value". The problem is usually that the various disciplines have developed such specific concepts, discourses and methods that most of the times can only be transferred to other areas with great loss of precision and standard of reflection. Many academics, especially within humanities, are therefore sceptical about large-scale interdisciplinary clusters and tend to refocus on their own disciplines.

Many scholars, especially in the cultural sciences, have realized that "travelling concepts" can be a promising way out of this dilemma, and they strongly favor travelling concepts as a suitable medium for interdisciplinary research. The travel metaphor was first introduced into epistemic discourse by Edward Saïd who spoke of "travelling theories" that wander through different disciplines and research fields.¹ In 2002, the Dutch cultural scientist Mieke Bal took up the travel metaphor, but preferred to speak of "travelling concepts" instead of "theories".² According to Bal, concepts – such as Image, Framing, Performativity, Tradition, Space, Body – are less complex and more flexible than elaborated theories, which can hardly be transferred to other disciplines. Bal states that "concepts are the tools of intersubjectivity", because they "offer miniature theories, and in that guise, help in the analysis of objects, situations, states, and other theories".³ This also clarifies what concepts are not: They are not and shall not be used – or misunderstood – as precise definitions. Concepts do not define their object, they rather "articulate an understanding, convey an interpretation (...) enable a discussion, on the basis of common terms and in the awareness of absences and exclusions."⁴

The potentials of travelling concepts in research can be summarized as follows:

- I. They foster innovative research, because they lead researchers to focus on different things than what is familiar to the particular academic discipline. Some “travelling concepts”, like transformation, image, intertextuality or performance, have already created new fields of research and study programmes.
- II. They are not bound to a whole theory that is so rich in prerequisites that it cannot be transferred to another academic discipline.
- III. Travelling concepts cross borders in four ways⁵
 - Epistemologically, between academic disciplines
 - Culturally, between academic and national cultures
 - Diachronically, between historical and empirical research
 - Synchronically between academia and society

At the same time the risks of using travelling concepts are also obvious:

- I. One risk has already been addressed by scholars with a postcolonial approach against Said's "travelling theories" who pointed out that a concept can sometimes be applied to other research fields in a way that endangers the inherent logic of that academic discipline. The Indian historian Dipesh Chakrabarty called this a "conquest" and a "provincialization" of other fields of research by a ruling theory. In fact, travelling concepts must not be applied in such a way that they attack or replace existing and proven approaches and methodologies of academic disciplines. If this happens, researchers will rightly oppose it.
- II. But if you are aware of the danger and try to avoid such "colonization", another risk arises: The concepts then become generalities or mere metaphors under which one can grasp everything and nothing. If everything is – in a sense – "construction", "identity", "transformation" or "image", then these terms lose their heuristically important usefulness and dissolve into petty metaphors.

Thus, a travelling concept proves to be a valuable instrument of interdisciplinary research only if it helps to see more or to understand something better compared to the research scenario without that concept. To achieve this, a travelling concept must be both precise and flexible. “Travelling concepts” therefore have to maintain a twofold balance:

- I. First, it is important that a concept holds the middle position between theory and metaphor. It must be more flexible than a sophisticated theory. And at the same time, it must be precise enough to be able to exclude what does not come into view under the lens of the respective concept. Thus, the heuristic utility becomes the main criterion.
- II. Second, concepts are not purely descriptive, but also "programmatic and normative"⁶, they delineate and sometimes transform the very objects of analysis. In view of our IRC, this aspect is particularly important. You can already see it from the external

impact of the terminology: "Coping with religious conflicts" seems to be particularly attractive for some, especially social and political actors, because it fuels the expectation that we are bound to recommend or develop particularly suitable and promising coping strategies. Looking back at many conversations I've had and also considering some answers in the questionnaires it is quite evident that the members of some of the disciplines involved in our IRC can live very well with this expectation and this claim, especially theology, philosophy, law and psychology. However, there is also some unease with such a normative claim among IRC researchers, I am thinking above all of religious studies and social anthropology. As both perspectives are included in the IRC, I am confident that we can reduce the risk of falling out of the plane on the left or right side of this alternatives.

Do these criteria for suitable travelling concepts apply to "coping"? Is that concept flexible and at the same time precise enough to help us understanding conflicts with religious dimensions better than without using that concept? I cannot answer this question conclusively today – we still need at least three years to do so. But within the remaining 30 minutes, I want to show you how I think we should approach this question, also by taking into account the preliminary findings of our individual projects.

I have just mentioned that one risk of travelling concepts is to dissolve them into mere metaphors. Talking about "Travelling concept" is of course itself a metaphor and I, as a theologian, love metaphorical language. So please allow me to use the metaphor of travel in my lecture furthermore. But I will restrict it to the structure of my lecture and be careful not to dissolve the concept of Coping itself into a petty metaphor.

3. Departure

3.1. The reason to travel

Why introduce a new concept, that of "coping", into the study of religious conflicts? And which other concepts are incorporated or replaced by it?

So far, conflict research and conflict mediation have operated mainly with the concepts of "conflict resolution" and "conflict transformation".⁷ The shift from conflict resolution to conflict transformation has been significantly influenced by John Paul Lederach and was a reaction to the common known fact that some conflicts simply cannot be entirely resolved.⁸ Previous research has emphasized that conflicts involving strong values and convictions cannot be solved because values are non-negotiable.⁹ This applies especially to so called 'religious' conflicts in which values and claims to truth are at stake. The usual approach of conflict resolution helps to de-escalate acute violent conflicts, but is not sustainable enough to enable societies to permanently and non-violently shape conflicts with religious dimensions. The concept of conflict transformation rightly emphasizes that conflicts are necessary and useful for functioning societies.¹⁰ In fact, conflicts involving religion often intensify and lose their constructive potential because emotional, factual and interpretive levels are blended. This is where the concept of "coping" comes in.

The concept of Coping covers different levels of dealing with conflicts. By integrating factual, emotional and rational aspects, it fosters a differentiated and at the same time structured analysis of conflicts. Thus, by introducing the concept of “Coping with Conflicts” we aim to contribute to further develop and differentiate the approach and the methodology of conflict transformation. This seems particularly useful, since "transformation" belongs to those travelling concepts that tend to become a mere metaphor because of their inflationary use over the last twenty years.¹¹

3.2 Home base

As a scientific concept coping has its “home base” in individual psychology and has been developed since the middle of the 20th century, initially in the context of trauma processing with soldiers who had survived the Second World War.¹² Richard Lazarus went beyond defense mechanisms in cases of trauma and an emphasis on pathology to include cognitive and behavioral responses that ordinary people use in their daily lives to cope with negative, particularly stressful situations.¹³ According to Lazarus, coping thoughts and behaviors are used to regulate distress emotions and to manage the problems causing the distress.

In contrast to mere defense mechanisms that distort reality in a rigid and undifferentiated manner, coping is a conscious and deliberate process in which humans are no longer described as passive beings exposed to certain processes, but as active beings capable of shaping conflicts. Overall, coping strategies aim at a re-evaluation of a conflict situation that causes stress.¹⁴

Psychological research distinguishes between three coping styles or coping strategies.¹⁵ Problem-oriented coping refers to instrumental thoughts and behaviors in order to change the conflictual structures and conditions. Emotion-focused coping aims at changing the emotional relationship with a stressful conflict situation that cannot be resolved or changed.¹⁶ Meaning-based aims at alleviating harm or suffering caused by the conflict by cognitive re-evaluation of a situation.

3.3 Equipment

What could be the advantage of coping over the two concepts conflict resolution and conflict transformation? To what extent is the concept of coping more flexible and at the same time more precise than the other two concepts?

- I. First, the concept of coping has the advantage of focusing not on a goal, but on the process; not on trying to resolve a conflict that may not be resolvable but on finding ways to handle it. The psychological definition does not imply that coping efforts have to be successful to be considered coping. Coping is what people in fact try to do when faced with conflict situations, regardless of the results. It is therefore suited as a descriptive, analytical category for conflict research.
- II. Second, the understanding of coping as an active handling of conflicts fits very well with the insight in the socializing function of conflicts, as social scientists have emphasized following Georg Simmel.¹⁷ People coping with a conflict are not seen as objects or victims, but as subjects who actively shape the conflict. Coping is therefore

a helpful concept for analyzing the complex dynamics of conflicts. This is particularly true because:

- III. Third, coping has already undergone a categorization in individual psychology and is thus already defined precisely enough not to become a mere metaphor (as it happens, to my impression, with transformation). The established distinction between emotion-based, problem-oriented and meaning-focused coping enables a differentiated and at the same time well structured analysis of various dimensions of conflicts, which is crucial in conflicts involving religion. The concept seems to be precise and at the same time robust enough to be applied to other fields and further developed.
- IV. Finally, the different occurrences of coping can be compared and evaluated regarding the different outcomes. Some forms of coping will prove to be more successful in particular conflict situations than others. Thus, the concept also has the potential to advance visions for the development of appropriate coping strategies. It *can* cross the border between pure descriptive analysis and the more normative recommendation but it does not *have to* do so.

4. Travel Map

The draft model for a context-sensitive analysis of religious conflicts

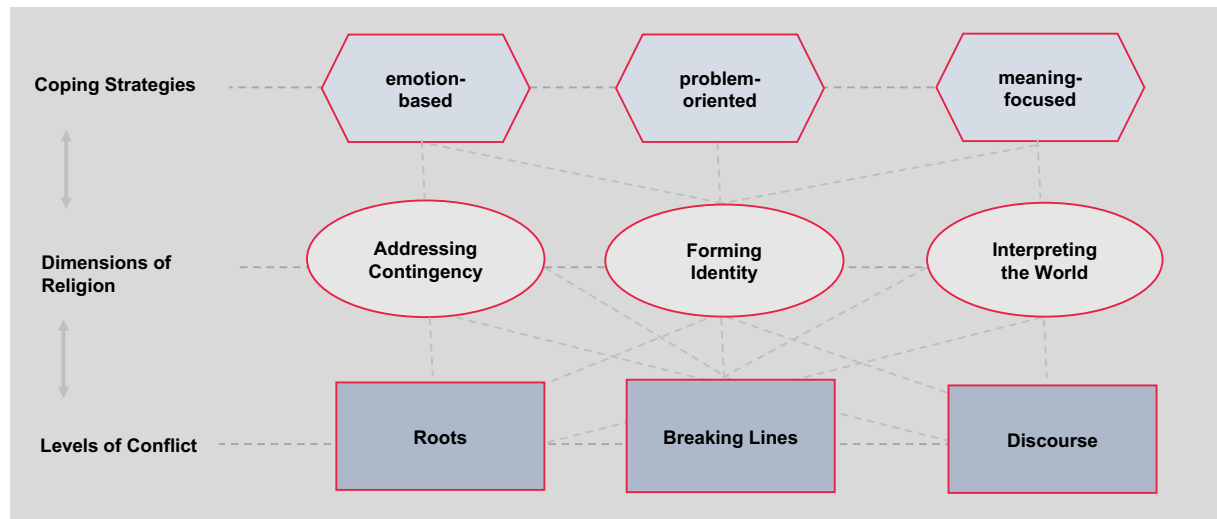
When preparing for our journey we first explored the potentials and risks of travelling concepts and we put as a criterion that the concept must be both flexible and precise enough to see more or to understand something better compared to the research scenario without that concept. When departing I tried to show you why, in my view, we should not carry along outdated concepts such as “conflict resolution” and why we should instead rely on “Coping”: It simply has the best potential to fulfil the above mentioned criterion for interdisciplinary research on religious conflicts. Let me now briefly show you the travel map with which we will find our way all along the route and through the 12 projects of the IRC.

The aim of the IRC is to provide an analytical model for context-sensitive analysis of conflicts, which maps out all possible conflict factors, religious and non-religious, and relates them to the various dimensions of religion. To date, there is no such model that goes beyond the boundaries of disciplines by combining social and cultural scientific findings with the hermeneutic knowledge of academic disciplines that reflect internal religious perspectives. The draft model, which you have also on your programmes, combines knowledge about the dynamics of conflicts and the dimensions of religion, which we have discussed in the first stages of our IRC and have agreed upon as working conceptualizations. To be clear: This draft model which is based on rich and varied discussions is not meant to be the definitive travel map but should instead up further discussions. The workshops this afternoon also serve this purpose.

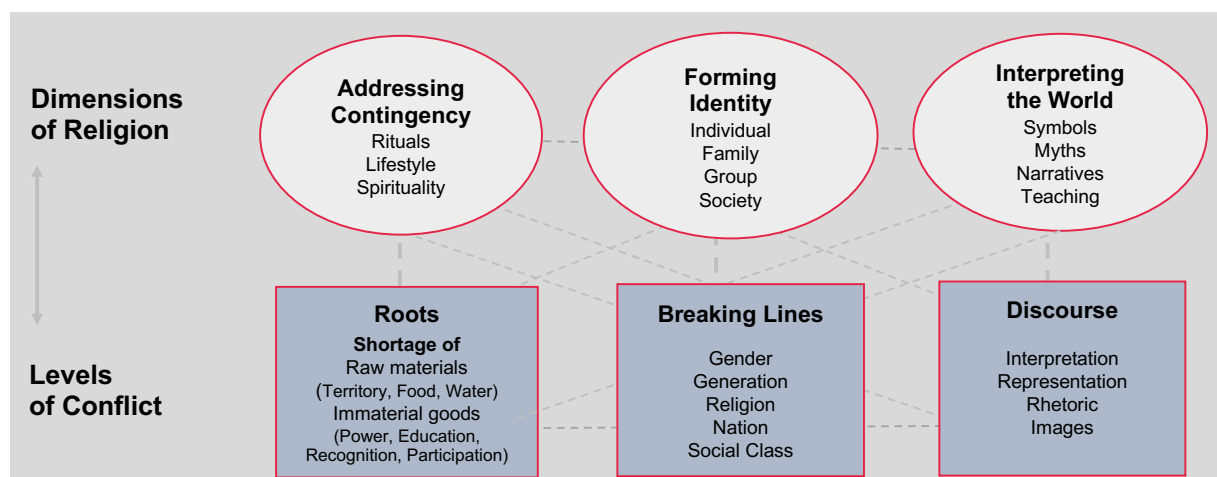
The model does not claim to *explain* the role of religion in conflicts in a generally valid theory. Rather, it clarifies – on the basis of the conceptualizing elements explained above – in a synthesizing and differentiating way which factors are to be considered in the analysis of religiously connoted conflicts and how they can interact. The model structures conflict analysis

by raising the question of how the different conflict factors and religious dimensions relate to each other in a concrete conflict. The primary aim is to develop an awareness of the peculiarity of religious conflict factors and promote the competence to evaluate these factors in a substantiated manner.

Draft Analytical Model



Details: Levels of Conflict & Dimensions of Religion



To begin with the levels of conflicts, there is a general consensus in research that every conflict has its roots in some sort of shortage, be it real or felt. This can be a shortage of food, territory, water, raw materials and money, but also of non-material factors such as education, power, social recognition, political participation or religious freedom.

Conflicts on these limited resources break out along certain identity markers or fault lines within societies, such as gender, generation, nation, religion or social class. Moreover, each conflict is accompanied by interpretations, rhetoric and symbols at the level of discourse.

How does religion relate to these levels of conflicts? To address this question, we should first arrive at a shared conception of what can be understood as "religion". So far, over 200 definitions of religion have been forward. Some of them focus on the content, others on the function of religion. Polythetic concepts of religion try to combine both. Within the IRCs internal scientific board, we have agreed not to *define* religion in a narrow sense, but rather to *describe* what religion contains and what it does. (And let me say this in brackets: In my view it is almost an academic quantum leap if religious studies and theology can agree on a common pragmatic working hypothesis!)¹⁸

First: religion addresses contingency and handles the way people feel and act through rituals, life styles and spiritual practice. Second: Religion contributes to forming identity, both individual and group identity. It thus also serves social integration at various levels: family, religious community, society. Third: Religion influences how people interpret the world by providing symbols, narratives, interpretations and teachings. These are spread by means of linguistic and visual rhetoric depending on the technical possibilities, nowadays increasingly also digitally, presumably without tangible effects on substance. Religion imparts meaning, often by referring to "other than empirical realities".

Of course, it is a bit suspicious if three stages of conflict, three dimensions of religion and three coping strategies appear in this model. And of course, you might rightly ask whether it is a coincidence that this triadic model was designed by a Christian theologian. To be frank, I am a little suspicious myself: There won't be a trinitarian structure creeping in, will there? At any rate, at least as far as conflict research and Coping styles are concerned, which are not only practiced by Christian theologians, the tripartite structure has long been established.

The IRC model should not suggest any connections that would then have to be tested in the concrete cases of individual office projects. Rather, it wants to point out and visualize which aspects must be considered and analysed if one wants to examine the influence of religion on conflicts. Here the decisive question will be whether the model contains the crucial elements and arranges them appropriately.

5. En route

Coping travelling through IRCs individual projects

Let's give you very first insights on what concrete coping strategies the individual projects have discovered on their travels during the first year. Doing so, let's keep in mind the double criterion for a promising travelling concept: it has to be flexible and precise enough to enable new insights in the respective field of research.

To make clear which of my considerations are inspired by which project, I will use this Alpine panorama that one can see in good weather from the "Grosse Schanze" in front of the main building of the University of Bern. When I refer to a specific project the little plane will fly to the respective summit.

5.1. Precise enough?

Overall, a fundamental observation is interesting and encouraging: While many doubts about the applicability of “coping” were expressed in the first questionnaire of 2018, before the start of our research work, these doubts no longer emerged in the second questionnaire round of 2019. One project (nr. 6) emphasises that the value-neutral analytical character of “coping” is very important and that the normative aspect should not become too strong – and I hope that these concerns could be allayed with the considerations I’ve just made.

All in all, the concept proves to be heuristic, even in its threefold differentiation:

Emotion-based Coping

Rituals are primarily mentioned here (pr. 6, 9, 10, 11, 12), and it will be worthwhile, also in view of the emphasis placed on this aspect of religion in cultural and religious studies, to examine more precisely and more concretely the influence rituals have on religiously connoted conflicts. It seems quite clear that they can do both exacerbate conflicts (pr. 6,9,11) – think, for example, of outbreaks of violence on religious holidays and places of worship, most recently the terror attacks against Christians in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday. But on the other hand, rituals – both religious and secular – also have the potential to pacify conflicts and to help people deal with the suffering and losses caused by conflict (pr. 10,11,12).

The close connection between emotion-based and meaning-focused coping is emphasized by the psychological project 2, and project 10 on the Swiss religious wars. Also projects 8, which investigates the cultural imprinting of religious emotions, and project 7 on the Swiss burqa-Debate promise interesting insights into the connection between these two levels.

Problem-oriented Coping

Problem-oriented coping aims to change the conditions that cause stress. In our projects, three main phenomena have been described as problem-oriented coping: legal regulations (pr. 3, 9), armed violence (pr. 9, 10, 11, 12) and the arranging of assemblies or common rituals of rival groups with the aim of creating a larger - e.g. national or religious – identity, a kind of "substitute identity", that supersedes the original conflict factors (pr. 6, 9, 10, 11).

In addition, in some projects specific coping strategies have been detected that could possibly expand the repertoire of problem-oriented coping: In the analysis of councils as "hot spots" of religious conflicts in late antiquity (pr. 9), spatial aspects are particularly relevant. For example, one can identify conflict parties or even construct them with seating arrangements, or change the concrete conflict conditions by exile of influential persons. Project 12 mentions another strategy which is prominent in the Israel-Palestine Conflict: namely the conscious preservation of the status quo, i.e. precisely the non-changing of stressful conditions in order not to exacerbate them. It would be an interesting question for psychologists to ask whether the conscious retention of the status quo in order to avoid greater stress is also regarded as coping or not. In both cases, questions of power, authority, presence become highly relevant. I will come back to this in a moment.

Meaning-focused Coping

It is probably not surprising that meaning-focused coping emerges as particularly important in conflicts with religious dimensions. For example, the question of the extent to which strategies of "othering" influence conflicts plays a central role in projects 5, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12. Coping that has been observed so far include: find other (non-religious) names for contested sacred sites in Israel/Palestine (pr. 12), the invention of secular or alternative religious counter-narratives, especially secular interpretations in the Mongolian conflict (pr. 11), highlighting common heritage, both explicitly non-religious (pr. 10 and 11) and religious (pr. 5, 12). Projects 3 (Law) and 7 (swiss burqa debate) observe how in secular societies sometimes all religious communities discover religion itself as a value for the secular society. Project 4 examines the extent to which philosophical-religious world interpretation itself holds resources for resolving religious conflicts. On the other hand, project 1, asks to what extent certain epistemic concepts influence the perception of conflict and religion in such a way that these conceptualizations themselves become conflict issues.

What will be of particular interest in the future are the interactions and interdependencies observed between these meaning-focused coping strategies and the other coping types. Projects 2 and 12 assume that religious meaning-focused coping aggravates conflicts while religious practice often helps people coping with the stress caused by religious meaning-focused coping.

And projects 3, 7, 8, 9 and 10 examine which consequences certain interpretations have on problem-oriented strategies, e.g. what effect it has on voting behaviour on councils if it is declared beforehand that the will of God can only be represented with unanimity (pr. 9). Or what concrete effects media discourses about the Burqa have on the political debate (pr. 7).

5.2. Flexible enough?

In view of its heuristic power, "coping" as a travelling concept seems not only to have survived the test of the first year in the IFK, but even more to have become stronger and more resilient. But what about the flexibility it must have in order to remain a helpful tool for interdisciplinary research? I think we have to consider four aspects related to flexibility when transferring the coping concept from the individual psychology to the social sphere:

- I. "Coping" must abandon its focus on individual emotions. In individual psychology, problem-oriented and meaning-focused coping are also ultimately related to emotions and serve to regulate emotions. First findings in the 12 projects show that in social conflicts, problem-oriented and meaning-focused coping have greater relevance and impact and can also act independently of other forms of coping. Furthermore, the effect they have on emotions cannot be examined as directly as in experimental individual psychology. The focus of the analysis shifts from the *effect* it has on individual actors to the *intention* of these actors. And even emotion-based coping is not reduced to emotions of particular individuals anymore. Many projects have described religious rituals as emotion-based coping (pr. 2, 6, 11, 12). Rituals, however,

are mostly community actions that have a great influence on the individual and also serve to channel or even regulate individual emotions. The interaction between "collective" and "individual" feelings in religious conflicts will need further investigation.

- II. Second, the question of how the success or failure of coping strategies can be measured is much more difficult to answer in social conflicts than in individual cases. In psychology a coping is considered successful, and I quote from the questionnaire of project 2, "when the balance between person and environment or their requirements and possibilities for action has been restored". Can this be transferred to groups and societies? And if so, how or by whom can this balance be verified?
- III. Third, when coping is applied to social phenomena, power issues become even more important than at the individual level. This is particularly emphasised by project 5 dealing with gender issues and mechanisms of "othering" , but also in all case studies on concrete conflicts. Power and authority do not only play a role on the problem-oriented level - this is investigated in projects 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12. But in sometimes more subtle ways power questions are also of importance on the level of discourse, i.e. meaning-focused coping (see pr. 1, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12). Here the question of power arises as a question of sovereignty of interpretation and access to discourses.
- IV. Finally - and for me this was the most surprising discovery from the questionnaires - on the meaning-focused level it must not be forgotten what influence today's research has on the dynamics of conflicts. This aspect is particularly and explicitly addressed in project 1, but it also appears prominently in questionnaires of other projects: pr. 12 refers to religious metaphors in scientific publications on the Israel-Palestine conflict, and pr. 11 observes the increasing influence of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences on the conflict over the deity Dorje Shugden. And in Project 5 the debate initiated by Jan Assmann on the affinity for violence of monotheism plays a major role. This aspect of meaning-based coping, in which we ourselves as researches are involved, must of course also be reflected upon. And this observation connects to the epistemic reflection on travelling conflicts: According to Mieke Bal, the "self-reflexive" retroactive effect on one's own discipline is an essential benefit of adventures with travelling concepts.

6. Arrival – Short Trip, Research Stay, or Migration?

I have tried to show with which expectations, under which conditions and with which map we and the concept "Coping" will travel, and which first repercussions are emerging from it.

How the journey ends will depend on the traces it leaves behind in the travel areas and the effects on - let me put it this way: the traveller's own "identity".

Is it a short day trip and will coping simply return to it's own home base even if a little changed, like in the story "Oh how beautiful is Panama" by Janosch, where the little tiger and the little bear arrive at home after a long walk in a circle and discover that their own home is actually the most beautiful place in the world?

Or is the journey extended to a longer research stay, where both the host and the guest benefit - and then, enriched by each other, return to their own, but keep in touch?

Or is the travel developing into a migration, with the concept of "coping" settling in new fields of research, perhaps changing in such a way that it can hardly be recognized in its old homeland?

I expect that this will be different in the individual projects and for all individual IRC researchers, and that's fine. Of course, my hope and my aim is to establish "coping" as a "traveling concept" in conflict research.

But as I was born and grew up in the former German Democratic Republic, I appreciate the freedom to travel wherever and as long as you want, but I just as much appreciate the opportunity to return, even if one has travelled to "enemy territory". Therefore, I am in favour of guaranteeing the freedom to travel and also to return to our travelling concept of coping.

So I thank the psychologists among us for releasing the concept of "coping" to travel and all the other projects for granting the traveller "coping" interdisciplinary hospitality.

And to you, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank you for your attention and I look forward to the responses from the members of our Scientific Board.

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Endnotes

¹ Saïd 1983; 2000.

² Baal 2002.

³ Bal 2002: 22.

⁴ Bal 2002: 23.

⁵ See Baumbach et al. 2012: 6.

⁶ Baal 2002:28.

⁷ Overview: Schliesser (in press).

⁸ Lederach (2003a.b).

⁹ Frazer 2013; Frazer / Friedli 2015.

¹⁰ See Schliesser (in press) with references.

¹¹ Cf. Schliesser (in press) who emphasizes the fluidity of both concepts, conflict resolution and conflict transformation. This can be seen as an advantage (Schliesser has this tendency). Within the framework of an epistemic theory of "travelling concepts", however, there is a danger that the concepts are not precise enough.

¹² Scherer (in press).

¹³ Lazarus 1966; 1991.

¹⁴ Aldwin 1994; Scherer (in press).

¹⁵ Folkmann/Lazarus 1988, Carver et. al. 1989, Zeidner/Endler 1996.

¹⁶ Folkman 1997; Pargament 2007.

¹⁷ Simmel 1908, Werron 2011, Pelinka 2015.

¹⁸ A wide variety of definitions and approaches are used to study conflicts with religious dimensions (Koppe 2010, Crudu/Radu 2011). Debate focuses above all on whether religion is merely exploited in political and social conflicts, which is often assumed by social and political scientists (e.g., Bormann et al. 2015, Pelinka 2016), or whether religions contain elements that inherently aggravate conflict and promote violence, a view often held by theologians and historians (Eynikel/Ziaka 2011, Nirenberg 2014, 2015, 2016, Pratt 2018). Brubaker (2015) distinguishes "generalising stances", which assimilate religiously informed political conflicts to other forms of political conflict, and "particularising stances", which see religiously informed political conflicts as *sui generis* and uniquely intractable. He rightly seeks to transcend this false opposition. Against the background of a broad and on-going scientific discussion of the challenge to define religion (de Vries 2008, Werkner 2016, Pollack 2018), including both functional and essential elements in our polythetic concept of religion is expedient. In polythetic conceptualizations of religion (Smart 1973, Kaufmann 1989, Saler 2000, Basedau 2016), a whole set of essential as well as functional characteristics have been determined, which enable us to identify a phenomena as being "religious". Within the IRC we work with a heuristic, polythetic concept of religion that distinguishes different dimensions of religion (cf. Krech 2018). According to this working definition, religion addresses and handles experiences of contingency. It shapes the way people feel, act and think, individually and as a group, through common behaviours, rituals, symbols, motivations, beliefs and interpretations of the world. It serves the integration and identity formation in societies through collective obligation. Thus, religion can be more closely conceptualised as an ensemble of beliefs and practices that refer to other-than-empirical realities.